

THESE words are being written in a tiny German guest-house which gazes with respectful upturned eyes at Ludwig's castle of Hohen-schanzen. It was there that King Ludwig in his Wagnerian infatuation had the opera of his beloved composer performed until the royal brain gave way. He is a figure of controversy; but this much can be agreed—never did a king go mad to such glorious music.

Perhaps I should explain that three of us had decided to go to Bayreuth by car and see the productions of "Die Meistersinger" and "Tristan and Isolde." With our car we were whisked across the Channel, from Lydd to Le Touquet in slightly less time than it would take for a London omnibus to crawl its way at a busy hour from Oxford Circus to Marble Arch. Our target for the night was Brussels.

It was strange to see the beaches of Dunkirk crowded with bathers as if there had never been the miracle of the little boats. For those who remembered the first world war there were even more poignant associations as the names of the battles, now reduced to mere signposts, guided us on our way.

**Brussels Sprouting**  
BRUSSELS is undergoing a face-lifting process in preparation for the great exhibition next year, and there are so



FRIEDELINDE WAGNER  
She came to do anti-Hitler propaganda.—See "Ill-Rewarded."

many temporary detours that we felt it a considerable achievement next morning to have got out of the capital and

on to the open road in just under an hour.

Cologne has had a new birth, but the once-gracious city on the Rhine has lost its former dignity. Everywhere sleek office buildings proclaim the architecture of the giant soap-box, with endless windows cut to one utility pattern. We had seen this in Brussels, too. The unification of Europe is in full process—or so it seemed until we reached Frankfurt.

There the mayor hospitably sent his deputy to show us the rebuilding of the city after its virtual destruction. Wisely the city fathers decided that it was not enough merely to build houses and flats, desperately needed as they were. The necessities of the moment, they held, should not deny the claims of the future. Thus, for example, when blocks of flats were planned in the neighbourhood of the almost-unharmful cathedral nothing was allowed to block the view of the cathedral spires. Wherever it was possible to give horizon to the open spaces it was done. There is no monotony nor feeling of repetition.

#### Wagnerian Shrine

BUT Brussels, Cologne and Frankfurt were mere incidents in our purpose. Bayreuth! The very name suggests voluptuous hills and sensuous valleys. Therefore it was a surprise to arrive at a very sensible provincial town of no great consequence to Germany or the world except as Wagner's home.

"Die Meistersinger" was due to begin at 4 p.m. with a tea interval of three-quarters of an hour and a dinner interval of an hour or more. We were advised to be prompt and, on arrival at the theatre, we saw the reason. It is a broad sweeping auditorium with no centre aisle. To my counting there were fifty-five seats in each of the slightly curving rows. Thus if anyone with a seat near the centre came in late he would have to crawl over about twenty-five people. But such is the Teutonic discipline of the whole affair that no one is late.

#### Invisible Orchestra

THERE was certainly a sense of occasion as the lights dimmed and a breathless silence

waited to be broken by the opening notes of the Meistersinger Overture. But where was the conductor, and for that matter where was the orchestra? The construction of the orchestra pit allows the singers to see the conductor, but to us he is completely hidden. As for the orchestra, we know of their existence only by the sounds that emerge from their hiding-place.

This however was no mere caprice. Richard Wagner, who was not one to court competition always contended that the orchestra should be invisible.

"I do not want the eye to be distracted by a moving phalanx: rather, especially effective in bows, the pulsing of the brass. Tristan on the second night—and the conductor's unavoidable gymnastics." He wanted to expose to the naked eye only the creatures of his own genius.

#### Forgiving and Forgetting

PERSONALLY I was genuinely aware of the vacuum. Opera-singers are not renowned for their acting whereas the eye is always entertained and excited by the ballet movements of the conductor.

There is some brilliant

large audience of beautifully adorned maidens. Here indeed was Drury Lane at its best. There were curtain calls for everyone except the conductor, who was probably sent home in a plain van.

The next afternoon the house was dimmed to complete darkness for the lonely opening notes of the Tristan prelude. The genius of Wagner was indeed at full tide when he composed this masterpiece, but hearing it as we did in utter darkness we felt that the sea and the winds and the lonely Metersinger won the laurels about us. I shall always re-

member that playing of the prelude as the supreme musical experience of my life. And certainly Wagner had won his point, even though the management allowed the conductor to emerge from the depths at the end of the opera and take a bow.

#### Ill-Rewarded

WHILE in Bayreuth I spoke on the telephone with Friedelinde Wagner, granddaughter of Richard and daughter of the amiable Siegfried. Hitler was a friend of the family and used to visit them at Bayreuth when he could spare a few hours from his machinations with destiny. It seems at least possible that the erotic qualities of Wagner's music played its part in unsettling his manic mind.

During the "phony war" Friedelinde got in touch with some of us in England and offered to come to London and do anti-Hitler propaganda. We put the case to the Foreign Office but they were adamant. The French were against letting her through and there were other reasons that made it impossible. A week later, towards midnight, I found her waiting for me at my house!

She kept her word about attacking Hitler but, when the blitzkrieg came, the authorities in London placed her under arrest and held her in confinement until Roosevelt in New York offered to take her out of our hands. I doubt if Friedelinde Wagner has ever forgiven us.

#### German Claustrophobia

NOW we are at Baden Baden with the Black Forest behind us and home and beauty ahead. Last night we went to

the casino, properly arrayed for the occasion, only to find that instead of white tie or black tie it was often a case of no tie at all. It seems a long time since we left London but that is part of the value of a holiday.

It may seem out of place in this diary to introduce a note of high politics, but it is impossible to journey across Western Europe without feeling some understanding of the traditional German feeling of claustrophobia. We, as an island people, are children of the sea. Always we have had open to us the ocean paths to distant lands. Driving through the Black Forest or the manufacturing towns of Germany one has a feeling of being land-locked. There is a physical as well as a psychological reaction to the endless line of hills that constantly stand sentry upon those who travel the roads.

#### People and Words

The career pyramid in the Navy at the moment looks more like Marilyn Monroe than a proper career pyramid.

—ADMIRAL SIR CHARLES LAMBE.

If our scientists found a cure for baldness tomorrow I would not do anything about it—I'm far too happy being bald!

—MR. ROBERTSON HARE.

Many young people today come from "four-wheel Christian" homes in which people go to church in a perambulator to be baptised, in a taxi to be married, and in a hearse to be buried.

—FEBRUARY H. L. FRANKLIN.

The "snob value" of a classical education is so robbing the country of engineers who can apply science to machinery that in Britain we produce only forty-five engineers per million of the population while America boasts us with 137 and Russia with 275.

—SIR ROY FREDEN.